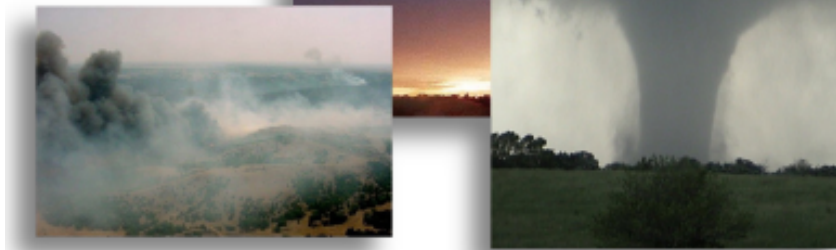


THE BEACON



Nebraska Emergency Management Agency

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2006



In This Issue:

- November Snowstorms
- CERT/SWAT Partnership
- EDW/COMMO Workshop
- Incidents & Awards

MASSIVE NOVEMBER SNOWSTORMS THAT ROCKED NEBRASKA COMMUNITIES DRAW FEDERAL ASSISTANCE

The 2005 Thanksgiving holiday turned into something more closely resembling a white Christmas when a winter storm system moving through Nebraska produced strong winds and blowing and drifting snow. Fifteen Nebraska public power districts reported significant damage from the storms, and 29 counties reported public damage in the days following the storms.

On January 26, 2006 Gov. Dave Heineman received word that Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) officials would make federal disaster funds available to affected communities in the 29 counties.

FEMA approved federal funding to



Douglas Street businesses in O'Neill were virtually inaccessible due to the blowing and drifting snow that struck the state on November 27 and 28, 2005.



A GMC Suburban hides behind a gigantic drift in the wake of November snowstorms in northeast Nebraska.

cover 75 percent of the costs to local governments of emergency work and damage restoration to public property in the affected counties. The remaining costs will be shared at the state and local levels. The following Nebraska counties have been approved for public assistance: Antelope, Boone, Boyd, Custer, Dawson, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Garfield,

Gosper, Greeley, Hayes, Holt, Kearney, Knox, Lincoln, Logan, Loup, Madison, McPherson, Nance, Perkins, Phelps, Pierce, Red Willow, Rock, Valley, Wayne and Wheeler.

Additional federal funds will also be made available to assist the state in covering costs for projects aimed at reducing the risks of similar disasters in the future.

"I am pleased that President Bush and FEMA have answered our request for public assistance at the federal level," Gov. Heineman said. "Many of the roads, utility poles and important public infrastructure in these communities were damaged during this winter storm, and these federal funds will assist Nebraska communities as they continue to recover."

In the days following the storms, Gov. Heineman said "I would especially like to commend the Nebraska State Patrol and the Department of Roads, along with local government and personnel, for their continuing efforts to ensure the safety of Nebraska's citizens and visitors."

(Continued on page 3)

(continued from page 2)

NOTES FROM THE STORM: Observances from Holt County Emergency Manager Carol Poesse

Our Alltel analog service went out during the storm. It rained all Sunday morning then started freezing. Everything had a half to one inch of ice on it. When the winds came up, power lines snapped, trees were downed, and there were bad electrical surges. The Alltel analog equipment east of O'Neill took several surges and low voltage hits, resulting in that equipment being damaged. I was contacted by the Nebraska State Patrol to see if I could help get someone up here to fix it. With rural electric out and Norfolk without power, all repeaters were on battery and dispatchers were trying to save what they had. They had contacted the local agent, who left repeated messages on the Alltel representative's business and cell phone, but he wouldn't return the calls. I also found out that the Chambers Fire and Rescue Units were trying to use their analog cell phones. They had no electricity in Chambers so their repeater was on battery. They were trying to stay off it. The owner of the heavy equipment business (Prouty Construction) the city had contracted with to get the streets open in O'Neill contacted me and said he had no way to talk to the men in the equipment since they all had analog cell phones.

I got on the internet and found Alltel's corporate headquarters in Atlanta and called. After being transferred four or five times, I was told that someone would get back to me within an hour. By 11:00 that morning I was contacted by the District Manager who told me that he had a repair man coming from Kearney loaded with everything he might possibly need to repair the equipment. If there was something he didn't have but needed, he (the District Manager) would personally drive up here with it from Grand Island. They said they would need to have the road opened up to the tower where the equipment was. I contacted John Prouty and he said he would have the road open in 30 minutes. I was notified by Alltel about 2:00 that afternoon that the repair

man had made it to O'Neill. At 4:06 that afternoon I got a call from Alltel that the analog equipment was up and running. We got communication for a lot of people with that repair.

During the storm I was contacted by E-911 dispatchers who had received a call from a man 24 miles north of Atkinson on county roads who had been without electricity since Sunday night. He had his 91-year-old father with him, and the temperature in their house was 40 degrees. County Roads had pulled all their equipment in since it was a total whit-out. On Wednesday morning the county took

their equipment out of Atkinson north to open the roads to this residence. It took four hours to get to them. At that point it was 28 degrees in their house and the 91-year-old dad had been under blankets for 36 hours to try to keep warm. On opening the road, a neighbor was able to get to them with a generator for electricity and heat.

The wind really packed this snow, which slowed down snow removal and opening

roads. A snowmobile went by the radio station early Tuesday morning and didn't even leave an imprint in the snow. It was more like concrete. They couldn't use the V-plows -- they had to use blowers and pay loaders.

Gil (my husband - we own the radio station here) left at 4:30 Monday morning and didn't get home until late Tuesday. He and the other three who managed to make it to the station spent the night, sleeping on the floor (he is 80). They felt they needed to keep the station going. There is a generator there. I also know shelters were set up in Neligh and Elgin, but don't know if emergency management was involved. From our records, the last storm we had like this was Thanksgiving in 1983, so most people were caught off guard and very ill prepared. However, there was a huge rush on generators the next week, as most rural electric customers were without electricity from three to eight days.



Natural Snow Sculpture

CHANGES AND CHALLENGES FORETELL EXCITING TIMES AHEAD AS EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT SHIFTS & GROWS

Today as I sit and write this opening to the latest issue of the Beacon, my mind is focused upon the varied tasks that will need to be implemented and carried out over the course of the next several months. Knowing the full scope of what is currently required and knowing more is yet to come, it places great demands on state and local agencies as partners to work together collectively to meet the demands placed upon us. As we meet in North Platte for the Communications and Exercise Planning Workshop more of these requirements will be presented. I thought I would take some time and bring everyone up to date on state/agency activities in the coming months.

Homeland Security Grants —

Between now and March 2nd, NEMA will be facilitating the state capability assessment, investment justifications and the submittal of the state application. Identified local partners will be involved in this process to identify state priorities, submit applications for support and then implement projects approved for funding. The amount of support available will not be known until probably August, 2006, and this includes all programs; SHSP, LETPP, CCP, MMRS and UASI.

National Infrastructure Protection Plan —

February 2006 will bring the release of the NIPP and state/local partners will be embarking on implementation at the state and local level. In the future, planning guidance will include how to integrate the NIPP into our current response plans in a very detailed manner with the future release of the sector specific plans.

Catastrophic Evacuation Planning. —

This past December NEMA received guidance for the initial review and assessment of catastrophic evacuation planning within the state and our two principal jurisdictions; Lincoln and Omaha. NEMA has now been contacted and a second stage review team will be coming to the state to

review the status of our report and make recommendations for future planning efforts and requirements.

NIMS —
Implementation at the state/local level will

continue to be a priority for our state and we initiate the use of NIMCAST to assess status and progress towards compliance. Future initiatives of the agency will continue to focus on NIMS as the guiding document that must be address within all levels of preparedness, planning, training and exercising.

I must point out to emergency managers within our state that each of the programs noted above are not traditional programs associated with emergency management in the traditional sense we have practiced over the years. The program continues to evolve, and emergency management is just one piece of the pie within the context of homeland security. We at the state level have consistently strived to maintain an “all hazards” focus upon our activities, however we must remain cognizant our jobs and responsibilities have expanded with the number of programs and requirements arising from the Department of Homeland Security. More and more our jobs as emergency managers are to be that central coordinating point that makes it all happen within our state. Exciting times are ahead for all and our challenge is to provide the needed leadership to facilitate programs and their implementation.



LANCASTER COUNTY C.E.R.T. PARTNERS WITH S.W.A.T.

Lancaster County Citizen Corps has a new partnership – the local SWAT team. In the past three weeks Corps volunteers have participated in two SWAT team exercises; once in a hijacked bus scenario, and as hostages in a local movie theatre.

These Citizen Corps/Volunteers in Police Service members are utilized as “victim” actors while being eyes and ears on the experience to

provide feedback to the SWAT team members following the exercise. Both experiences have been amazing for the volunteers. The Citizen Corps participants continue to be impressed with the professionalism and efficiency of the local SWAT team. The SWAT team trains every couple of weeks and will hopefully continue to utilize the Citizen Corps volunteers. The photos are of the corps being briefed on the exercise, the “actor hijackers”, and the SWAT team as it approaches the bus.



FILLMORE COUNTY HAZARDOUS MATERIAL INCIDENT

PHOTO AND REPORT COURTESY TERRY MARSHALL, FILLMORE COUNTY E.M.

On January 16th, 2005 a tanker overturned on Route 81 south of the Community of Strang in Fillmore County. The incident was dispatched at 6:07 am as a semi accident with injury. The 911 Dispatcher on duty determined that the semi unit was pulling a loaded tanker carrying hazardous material and that product was leaking from the tank. The initial response was Geneva Fire & Rescue, Sheriff's Department, Nebraska State Patrol and Emergency Management. Emergency units, on arrival at the scene, found two occupants of the semi-tractor having minor injuries and were transported to Fillmore County



Hospital. The tanker the semi tractor was pulling had rolled over several times, causing a breach in the tank causing contents to spill on the ground. Unified Command was established with the State Emergency Response Team being requested for technician support. The project in the tanker was identified as ISO Hexane, a highly flammable liquid. The State Department of Roads was requested to dike the drainage areas at a safe distance downstream and upstream of the incident to establish a barrier to contain chemical run-off. HAZMAT Technicians took vapor readings and determined that only one lane of route 81 had to be closed for the incident. The weather was a significant positive factor in this incident, due to temperatures in the mid 30's slowing the evaporation of the ISO HEXANE, and winds from the northwest at 30 to 45 mph causing rapid dispersion of vapors, reducing the fire hazard. Safety and containment of the chemical remaining on the tanker, along with spilled product on the ground, were primary objectives throughout the incident. CHEM-TRAC was contacted, who assisted in coordinating the chemical company and trucking company with on-scene responders. Original indications were that about half the contents of the tanker could be released into the environment. The Trucking Company had a contract with a hazardous materials emergency response recovery and clean-up company who responded from North Platte, Nebraska and Olathe, Kansas. Clean-up personnel began arriving shortly after noon to evaluate the situation and formulate a clean-up plan. The first priority was to bring in another tanker and off-load the remaining chemical on the damaged unit. During this operation Fire and Rescue units stood by supporting the contract recovery and clean-up crew. Off-loading of the damaged tanker was complete by 5:30 pm, with the damaged unit removed from the area. The HAZMAT clean-up crew removed all contaminated dirt from the area and filled in the spill area with uncontaminated soil. The clean-up was completed on Friday January 21st. This incident was considered by all to be a highly successful operation due to the use of NIMS and Unified Command involving all agencies and departments involved with the incident. Responders and contractors all had completed training on NIMS within the past two months. While NIMS is not a new concept, it was a refresher to incident management that was put to practical application in an actual incident.

KEARNEY COUNTY INSTALLS NAWAS PHONE SYSTEM

Jeff England, Kearney County Emergency Management Director, has announced that Kearney County has just installed the NAWAS phone system into the Kearney County Communication Center. Their call ID is "Minden".

The National Warning System (NAWAS) is a communications system originally designed and implemented in the 1950's as a means of notifying and preparing for a nuclear attack. Fortunately the system was never used for its intended purpose, but has proven invaluable to local emergency managers responding to or coping with natural disasters.

The National Warning System supports the nonmilitary actions taken by Federal agencies, by the private sector, and by individual citizens to meet essential human needs; to support the military effort; to ensure continuity of Federal authority at national and regional levels; and to ensure survival as a free and independent nation under all emergency conditions, including a national emergency caused by threatened or actual attack on the United States.

The National Warning System has major terminals at each State EOC and State Emergency Management Facility. Today, the system consists of what is effectively a

2200+ telephone party line. Obviously, it is more than a normal telephone system. The phone instruments are designed to provide protection for lightening strikes so they may be used during storms. The interconnecting lines are provided some protection and avoid local telephone switches. This ensures they are available even when the local system is down or overloaded.

The system is used by local officials thousands of times a year for emergency management coordination and response. One typical scenario is the use of the system during tornadoes. As storms are sighted, emergency managers in one town or county can communicate with their colleagues in other counties who are in the path of the storm, advising them as to direction, speed, and intensity. The drawback to this system is it relies on human intervention. If there is no one there to receive the communications the warning is not disseminated. This has resulted in missed tornado warnings. Today modernization and automation are planned in most telecommunications systems. Both the National Warning Center (NWC) and the Alternate National Warning Center (ANWC) at Olney, MD, are staffed 24 hours per day and serve as the primary control for the National Warning System (NAWAS).

GRAND ISLAND RENEWS STORMREADY RECOGNITION

The City of Grand Island, through the Grand Island/Hall County Emergency Management Agency, has renewed their recognition as a StormReady community by the National Weather Service. The recognition will continue through 2008.

Recognizing the need for uniform guidelines dealing with hazardous weather response operations, the National Weather

Service (NWS) designed a program called "StormReady" to help cities, towns and counties implement procedures to reduce the potential impact from disastrous weather events. StormReady is a voluntary program, and is offered by the NWS as a means of providing guidance and incentive to officials interested in improving their hazardous weather operations.

ASSISTANCE TO FIREFIGHTERS GRANT WORKSHOPS OPEN

The Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) is a competitive grant opportunity for local fire departments and Emergency Medical Service (EMS) organizations that are not affiliated with a hospital. The AFG funds activities such as purchasing firefighting equipment, personal protection equipment, training, firefighting vehicles, and firefighter/first responder safety projects.

Each year the AFG regional staff conducts hundreds of workshops nationwide to provide up to date program information to applicants. On Wednesday, January 18, 2006 the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (AFG) will begin posting the FY 2006 AFG workshop schedule on its website: www.firegrantsupport.com. The workshops are scheduled and conducted

by AFG regional representatives and offer current program information for any fire and/or EMS organization that wishes to submit a 2006 AFG application.

There is no admittance charge to any AFG workshop. The schedule will provide the locations, dates, times and points of contact for each workshop. If you are unable to attend a workshop offered in your area, the program office will also be providing on the AFG website an electronic copy of the PowerPoint presentation used at the workshops. In addition, by mid-February, the applicant tutorial, the FY 2006 AFG Program Guidance, and a list of FAQ's will be available on the website. During the application period, there will be an expanded help desk at 1-866-274-0960 and at FIREGRANTS@DHS.GOV.

PHELPS COUNTY NOW BOASTS CITIZEN CORPS

Phelps County has just joined into the Citizens Corps network and will be hosting it's first CERT training at the end of March in Holdrege. Jim Reider (aka J.R.) has been beating down the doors of many local folks seeking an interest in such a group and has succeeded. He also has been working on Buffalo County as well, and it sounds as if they will also be forming a Citizens Corps group. Susan Burton, with the Nebraska Volunteer Service

Commision, and Amy Elwood of Two Rivers Public Health District also have been an instrumental part of getting Phelps County to this point by providing some grant funding to put on the first class. Registrations have begun to come in and we are hopeful of at least 30 people to take the initial training. Instructors will include; J.R. Reider, Paula Reider, and Loren Uden.
(Report courtesy of Pat Gerdes, Region 15 EMA)

On the cover...

Powerful winter storms drifted snow into impassable drifts throughout 29 counties in Nebraska during November 2005. Holt County Emergency Management Director Carol Poesse sent this photo of a youngster standing tall in O'Neill.

FIRST RESPONDERS MORE READY FOR EMERGENCY

By JIM OSBORN/Columbus Telegram Staff Writer
Courtesy of Columbus Telegram

When an ice-choked Loup River sent floodwaters over the south bank into businesses and homes in Columbus in March 1993, emergency workers didn't have the resources to mount a coordinated response.

A dozen years ago, first-responders launched a more localized response as the flood threat grew, monitoring the ice on the river, weather conditions and river flows in the area. In 2005, state and regional agencies have been brought into the fold to assist local authorities.

"Today's response would be totally different," said Tim Hofbauer, director of Platte County Emergency Management. "It would be better."

Hofbauer handled the release of public information during the 1993 disaster.

If that flood that extended over several days occurred in 2005, multiple outside agencies would be involved, with a unified command structure, a joint information and communications center established and a more efficient allocation of resources, Hofbauer said.

State officials and the National Weather Service would be involved in monitoring the ice conditions, temperatures, forecasts, upstream snow totals and river flows. Local agencies upstream from Columbus would be reporting on the river.

"We'd know what was happening upstream and be watching a lot closer," Hofbauer said.

Shortcomings in the nation's response to emergencies became glaring in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on New York City's World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001. The toppling of the Twin Towers

provided the catalyst for the federal government boosting security measures on the homefront.

As part of that effort, the government tied the Homeland Security Agency and grants for local law enforcement and fire improvements to compliance with the National Incident Management Systems (NIMS) and the Incident Command System (ICS). If local agencies don't comply with the NIMS training requirements, Homeland Security funds will dry up, and other grants for police and fire departments could also be jeopardized.

Those systems established a unified set of guidelines for local first-responder agencies to use in reacting to emergencies, Hofbauer said.

With ICS, terms and definitions used by emergency workers would be institutionalized across the multiple agencies in a region. At the scene of a disaster, one person would be in placed in charge of all operations.

NIMS sets guidelines for a coordinated disaster response by incorporating such things as comprehensive resource management, personnel accountability and integrated communications.

Hofbauer said first-responders in Platte County, including the Sheriff's Department, Columbus Police Department and seven fire departments, have been working to complete the NIMS training requirements. A four-hour class introducing the principles of NIMS and ICS is required for federal compliance, which keeps the Homeland Security spigot open for future funding.

About 240 area people have completed the

(Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9)

training, Hofbauer said. An estimated 100-150 people have yet to complete the class.

"We'll be in compliance by (the federal deadline) September 2006," Hofbauer said.

Platte County agencies received nearly \$392,000 in Homeland Security grants last spring, with the funds earmarked for improving interoperable communications in the county and region. One of the criticisms leveled about the response to 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina in late-August was that emergency workers couldn't talk to one another on their radios, which resulted in the loss of lives.

The county is using the funding to develop communication systems to connect first-responders, public works, public health and health care entities. Local agencies have been operating on a host of unreliable systems that have been incompatible within the county as well as with a number of surrounding counties.

"There was a feeling that we were a little bit behind," Hofbauer said.

The inter-operability of communications within the county will be resolved with the completion of a 180-foot tower along U.S. Highway 81 near Platte Center. Construction of the tower has been slowed by recent bad weather.

The county's plans will begin rolling this spring with the installation of new radios in emergency response vehicles, Hofbauer said. "That will give us mobile (vehicle to vehicle) communications coverage."

Hofbauer said the county is still in the process of developing communications inter-operability with agencies from outside the county through the East Central Communications Alliance, which consists of Platte, Boone, Colfax, Butler, Polk, Merrick, Nance and Howard counties.

Copyright © 2005 Columbus Telegram

CUSTER COUNTY FIREFIGHTERS HELP IN LOUISIANA

Stories continue to emerge out of the devastation that was Hurricane Katrina's terrible gift to the Gulf Coast, and two of them come out of Nebraska's Custer County.

Corey Clay and Bryan Jensen, both volunteer firemen in Broken Bow, responded to an e-mail from the United States Fire Administration asking for help. Within 48 hours of being accepted, Clay and Jensen headed south. After arriving in Atlanta on September 7, they waited two weeks for deployment.

They were sent to central Louisiana to

begin their aid efforts. Jensen returned home in November, and Clay estimated that he would return in February. He is functioning as one of two unit leaders in Louisiana.

Clay said he would volunteer again for this kind of disaster. He has been motivated to become a FEMA disaster assistance employee.

The Custer County Chief newspaper featured the volunteer efforts in a front-page story in early January

COMMUNICATIONS, EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT JOIN FORCES AT NORTH PLATTE COMBINED CONFERENCE

The Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the Nebraska Division of Communications joined forces January 31 – February 2 in North Platte to present three days' worth of information and guidance to communications and emergency service personnel from across the state.

The conference devoted two days to issues surrounding interoperable communications, and a third day focused on homeland security and emergency management. The event drew 187 attendees from 87 of Nebraska's 93 counties.

NEMA Assistant Director Al Berndt pointed out that this is the first time the two organizations have combined to present materials at the same event. The interrelated nature of the two disciplines and the multitude of common interests made the joint venture a natural.



Lt. Governor Rick Sheehy spoke to open the conference, and pointed out the increasing value of solid planning in the creation of interoperable communications systems.

Lt. Governor Rick Sheehy opened the session with an address to the group. "Nebraska continues to be a leader in the homeland security program, and that's because of people like you," he said.

Berndt pointed out in remarks to the session that federal funding is expected to decrease in the years to come, and planning will become increasingly important. The conference attendees need to place an emphasis on planning to bring the maximum benefit to their jurisdictions as resources wane. A major element of the struggle to wring the utmost benefit from shrinking funding will be the creation of interoperable communications systems and strategies throughout Nebraska.



(Continued on page 12)

(Continued from page 11)

“Ensuring that public safety first responders can communicate with one another is a high priority, and has been for a long time,” said Sheehy. He recapped state efforts toward that goal, listing the upgrading of equipment in nearly every county and the development of statewide benchmarks and a statewide mutual aid frequency.

Sheehy pointed out that one of the secrets to a successful interoperable communications program is not necessarily an equipment solution. “One of the keys to Nebraska’s approach is the recognition that interoperability is primarily a management problem, and less a technical problem,” Sheehy said.

He pointed out that some states have developed strong programs technically, but that have not had the support or personnel to integrate the process. Again, planning is a vital element to this development.

“Planning standards ensure that an ongoing understanding of public safety re-



Mike Jeffres (right) of the Nebraska Division of Communications discusses the strategy of interoperable communications plans with Thurston County Emergency Management Agency Director Tom Perez.

mains a priority as technologies change,” Sheehy said.

The first two days featured breakout sessions for both technical and administrative tracks, with displays and presentations by communications vendors. The final day was devoted to homeland security and emergency management issues, with an emphasis on the homeland security grant process for 2006. Guidelines for the grant application and administration

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

For a list of training offered by agencies other than N.E.M.A., visit the N.E.M.A. website at <http://www.nebema.org> and click the link for “News and Events”